The Idea of the Digital University: Ancient Traditions, Disruptive Technologies and the Battle for the Soul of Higher Education

Frank Bryce McClusky and Melanie Winter

In an early chapter of their book 'The Idea of the Digital University', Frank McCluskey and Melanie Winters quote the playwright Eugene Ionesco, 'all history is a succession of crises, rupture, repudiations, resistances'. The authors' larger idea here is that the 21st–century university is also not exempt from the current socio-technological crisis and rupture occurring through the present digital revolution. The book conducts an exploration of the relatively new phenomenon of the digital online university through perspectives of ancient traditions, disruptive technologies, and current debates occurring in the field of higher education. What is really to be enjoyed in this book is the text's wide berth, situating the 21st–century online university in a wide historical trajectory and within ongoing present discussions. Larger questions that the book grapples with surround how the institution of the traditional university is transforming into larger sets of digital assets to be managed — how and by whom?

Erudite, balanced and measured, McCluskey's philosophy/academic administration background is in evidence, examining the online university from perspectives ranging from McLuhan and the Toronto School of Harold Innis's Empire and Communication, to classic philosophical landscapes (Plato, Aristotle, Kant). The book also importantly situates the online university in the context of 'learning' and within current technological possibility. The text traverses a historical evolution of the university, ranging from histories of American universities, both the ivy leagues and recent for-profits, to the historical foundations of the institutions at Oxford and the Sorbonne, and to the completely new digital entrants. Present developments of the 21st–century university as database are also explored, including the wealth of digital asset, data and media to be managed, mined, explored and organised. To be sure, this is a fair and balanced text containing a multiplicity of views and offering plenty of room to reflect on the complex debates currently occurring on our campuses. Winter's background adds the lesser-known ground of the digital transformation of the university registrar's office, university libraries, student funding and various operational divisions, all explored and interlinked through the technological paradigm shift occurring.

Various sections of this text are worth bookmarking: big data, analytics and the online classroom especially are drawn in careful interrelation. The authors' division of university governance into 'bureaucracy–centred', 'learning–centred' or 'teacher–centred' is also useful for anyone coming to grips with new academic technology possibilities and how to manage the digital assets now contained therein. The book is highly readable: informed and eloquent while not shying away from current contentious debate. Accreditation and online versus face–to–face teaching are all examined from various perspectives. The authors also ask near the book's end 'What of those teaching moments that cannot be analytically measured or that may be lost? How much can be automated and what must remain for a university to retain its soul?' (p. 174). Quoting Yeats, the authors comment, 'Education is not the filling of a pail but the lighting of a fire'. The book is highly recommended for those interested in the future of education and our universities.

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The idea that digital is all about technology is a common misconception. Of course, technology plays an important role, but it is simply the canvas upon which the digital experience is created. Many universities looking for a digital quick fix, procure new technology platforms via their IT departments without first understanding the wider role of digital across the institution. IT-led programmes seldom deliver the anticipated benefits and can disadvantage universities while they wait for outcomes that never materialise. Academics and staff don't automatically know how to use social media for the benefit of the university without the appropriate guidance and support. The Idea of the Digital University: Ancient Traditions, Disruptive Technologies and the Battle for the Soul of Higher Education Edition Unstated. by Frank Bryce McCluskey (Author), Melanie Lynn Winter (Author). Frank McCluskey has been at the forefront of the online revolution in higher education since the 1980s. He took his PhD in Philosophy with a thesis on Hegel from the New School and has been a National Endowment Post Doctoral Fellow at Yale University. He has published numerous articles and has lectured all over the world. He has served as Dean of Online Learning at Mercy College in New York and is the retired Provost of the American Public University System where he oversaw more than 85,000 students and 1,600 faculty, all operating online. target advanced digital skills development though steps such as extending the Digital Opportunity traineeships to VET learners and apprentices, and offer professional development opportunities for teachers, trainers and other educational staff. encourage women's participation in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) with the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) and support the EU STEM Coalition to develop higher education curricula which attracts women to engineering and ICT based on the 'STEAM' (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics) approac... The Hub will also support user-driven innovation and engagement through the Digital Education Hackathon. Previous work on digital education.